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THE MOUNTAINEERS

WILLIS BOYD ALLEN

MOUNTAINEER SERIES No 1.

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STELLA IN THE WOODS.

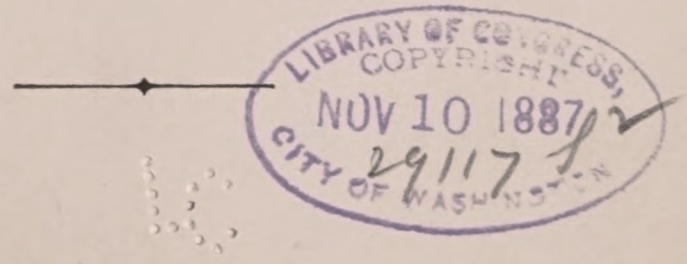
Mountaineer Series. No. 1.

THE MOUNTAINEERS.

BY

WILLIS BOYD ALLEN,

AUTHOR OF "CHRISTMAS AT SURF POINT," "PINE CONES," "SILVER RAGS," "THE NORTHERN CROSS," ETC.



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CONTENTS.

CHAPTER		PAGE
I.	Sparrows in the Rain . . .	1
II.	Journey to the Hills . . .	11
III.	A Discovery	22
IV.	The Mountain Home	32
V.	Bright Days	39

THE MOUNTAINEERS.

CHAPTER I.

SPARROWS IN THE RAIN.

It was a dark, stormy night. Through the little town of Selborne the wind swept fiercely, giving every door a savage knock as it passed, and singing no end of doleful songs in the tree-tops. The rain, too, was falling in steady streams, and seemed to take especial pleasure in dashing in under Robert Alden's tattered umbrella, every time the wind tipped it up — which it did at almost every step, you may be sure. How the

drops did run from his brown beard and shabby hat and all the points of his umbrella, as he plodded along through the mud!

Pretty soon he glanced ahead, and saw a bright light gleaming cheerily through the black night.

"Ah!" said he to himself, "Polly has put a candle in the window for me. She knew I would be lonely and wet and tired, and the candle is to cheer me up a bit."

It was not long before he reached a small cottage surrounded by a neat white fence; and entering the little gate went up the walk toward the side door, which, funnily enough, was in the front of the house. The builder had thought it pleasanter to have

the cottage face the garden on one side, rather than stare into the dusty street all the time. So the front door was in the side, and the side door in the front.

The lower windows were draped with red curtains, which were drawn back so that Robert could see two or three chubby faces pressed up against the panes on the inside. Beyond these he caught a glimpse of a tea-kettle steaming merrily on the stove, a table with snowy cloth set for supper, and Polly, his bright-faced little wife, bustling about in her preparations for the meal.

The moment the children saw him, they set up a shout and rushed to the door, so that when

Robert opened it he was instantly surrounded and climbed upon and kissed in a way that would have done your heart good. Off went the wet coat and hat, the umbrella was folded (all except one arm, which it would persist in sticking out straight) and carried away to the wood-shed.

By this time Polly had come for her share, and it was altogether a jolly time, you may be sure.

As soon, however, as they were all seated at table and the children were busy with their bread and milk, a cloud fell on their father's brow and on Polly's. For she was just like a mirror, and every shadow on Robert's face was sure to come out in two sober little puckers on her kindly forehead.

"Polly," said Mr Alden, after a minute or two, "it's no use, I don't know which way to turn."

"What is it now, Rob?"

"The company have shut down work at the mill and are only going to run half-time. Of course they only want half the number of hands, and"—

"You're discharged!"

"That's about it," answered Robert, with a sad smile. "After next Saturday there's no prospect of another job until fall or winter. Here it is only April, and what shall we do for the next six months?"

"I'm not sure," said his wife, shaking her head slowly and swallowing a little choke with her

tea. "I suppose we shall be cared for in some way. If it was n't for the children" — she said, glancing toward the three curly heads, and paused.

The nearest, a boy of twelve, who had been hearing every word, looked up quickly and met her eye.

"Don't cry, mother," he said, reaching over and stroking her hand. "I am sure He won't forget us. He can't get to sparrows without reaching us first, you know."

"But it was only yesterday, King, that a whole lot of sparrows were driven away from the mill. Yes, and from the old church too, where they 've had nests ever so long."

It was a girl who spoke, perhaps a year or two older than her brother.

"I know, Stella; I was there when the man beat the vines and drove them off. But I did n't see any of the birds fall to the ground. It was only their nests."

"Just as bad!"

"No; they can build new ones."

"Not here in the village. Nowhere near the mill, any way."

"Then they can fly off and try somewhere else."

Mr. Alden looked over at his wife with a new hope in his face. If the birds can seek new homes, why not folks as well?

Polly saw his look and answered it.

"If you could get a place anywhere else, Robert," she said, "we could move easily. Stella and King would help, and though it seems too bad to leave the cottage, still, perhaps it 's best."

"I suppose," said Mr. Alden, slowly, "I could ask the railroad people for a job. You know they 've always been very kind since King got that log off the track last summer. I declare I 'll try!"

The shadow had gone from his face, and of course Polly brightened up too. She took the youngest boy, Winthrop, a mischievous little eight-year-old, into her lap, and began to undress him for bed.

Meanwhile, Mr. Alden took a worn, leather-covered Bible from a shelf near by, and opened it at the Ninety-first Psalm. He read only a few verses, then turned to the New Testament and read about the sparrows and the loving Christ who told of them in those sweet, far-off days. When he had finished, they knelt together and Robert Alden prayed. He always tried to talk to his Father in heaven in such a simple way that the children could understand it all. This was pretty nearly what he said that stormy night:

"Dear Lord, we should be very much troubled and afraid if we did not know you were here, taking care of us and the birds out

there in the darkness, and the storm itself. Please make us very good sparrows, and let us remember to fly sometimes, instead of hopping all the time on the ground after crumbs. Amen."

A Fir Mountain Girl.

CHAPTER II.

JOURNEY TO THE HILLS.

THE next day was full of sunshine. When King awoke, the golden light was pouring in through the windows of the room where he and his little brother Winnie slept. Outside, the sparrows were wishing each other good-morning in soft twitters. Winnie was still asleep, and King crept out of bed without rousing him. In ten minutes more he was dressed and down-stairs, ready for his day's work. School did not begin till nine, and it was now only half-past six.

"Let me see," said King to himself. "I must do something for mother, because she will be a little anxious about father's getting a place to work."

He moved about the kitchen softly, laid the kindling-wood in the stove, and soon had a good fire blazing. Next he filled the tea-kettle with fresh water and put it on to heat; then swept up the hearth nicely, and went out into the sweet morning air.

"I'll be like the Scotch brownies," he said gleefully. "Mother will be surprised enough when she comes down." And indeed she was astonished and delighted to find what her boy had done. It was not merely because he had

built a fire, and so saved her the trouble, but because he was loving and thoughtful enough to do it.

After breakfast Mr. Alden started out to look for work. First he visited the mill.

"We 're sorry, Alden," said the owner, "but you see there 's so little business we must stop for a while. Here 's a strong letter of recommendation which may help you."

Robert was glad of the letter and of the warm pressure of the hand which his old employer gave him at parting.

Next he applied at the railway-station. The agent at this point had control of a large section of the line, and seemed glad of the chance to help Mr. Alden.

"I'll tell you what," he said kindly, "I could give you a place as brakeman, or perhaps even assistant baggage-master. But I know a position that will please you better. At the Fir Mountain station, twenty-five miles above here, there's a small store close by the depot. You know there's a big hotel there, and lots of people trade at the store — or would, if it was open. The man that had it last summer has gone West, and we've been looking for somebody to take his place. What do you say?"

"What sort of a store? What do they sell?"

"Oh, candy and fruit, Indian baskets, birch bark, and the like.

You can give us a part of the money you take, after you get started. We 'll furnish the stock to begin with, and you can pay us for it a little at a time."

"I 'll do it," said Robert, firmly, "and glad of the chance. When do you want me to be there?"

"Better go right off. The summer boarders will begin to come soon, and you need a little time to get settled."

What a bustle there was at the cottage when the plan was announced! The children were wild with delight; even quiet King capered about with Winnie on his shoulder. All that day and the next the whole family worked hard at packing. The cottage was a

pleasant one, and Mr. Alden easily arranged matters with the landlord. He knew a couple, he said, who wanted just such a house, and they would move in as soon as the Aldens were out. There was one question which puzzled them till the last minute. They had a cow which the children dearly loved, and whose milk seemed sweeter than any they had ever tasted. Should old Whiteface go with them or not? Mr. Alden was of the opinion that she ought to be sold, but Winnie begged so hard that they decided at length to let his four-footed friend accompany them to their new home.

On the third morning after the

storm the whole family bade good-by to the old home, walked to the station, saw their few household goods put into the baggage-car, and took the north-bound train. Whiteface had been sent on ahead in a cattle-car.

The low levels were soon left behind, and the cars began to move more slowly as they entered the hill-country. It so happened that not one of our friends had ever been so far in this direction. It was all new to them.

Up, up, through the winding valley, beside a roaring, foaming stream, the train made its way. There were not many passengers at this early season, and the Aldens had all the room they

wanted. King was on the lookout to help somebody, and soon had a chance. An old lady two seats in front of him found the air chilly and tugged in vain at her open window.

"Please, ma'am, will you let me try?" said a pleasant boyish voice at her elbow. King gave it a sharp blow, as he had seen the conductor do, and down it came.

The old lady was pleased, and gave him some sugared flag-root, which King did n't like a bit, but which he accepted politely.

Now the mountains on each side of the track were higher than ever. Mrs. Alden declared it made her quite dizzy to look up so far, almost to the very clouds, and

then down to the bottom of the valley below them.

When the conductor came for tickets, Mr. Alden showed him a pass the kind-hearted railroad agent had given him for all his family and one cow.

"Ah," said the conductor, smiling, "I saw a nice-looking cow standing beside the track near the Fir Mountain station this morning. She was tied to a telegraph pole."

"What color was she?" asked Winnie eagerly.

"Red, with a white face."

"That was old Whiteface," exclaimed the boy, with great satisfaction. "She 's got there all right. Only," he added, "I hope

nobody will telegraph down that pole into her ear."

The conductor laughed and passed on, clipping tickets as he went. Winnie amused himself for some time longer talking to his kitten, which he had brought from Selborne in a basket.

The train now commenced to go more and more slowly, and presently it stopped before a little station near a much larger white building.

"Fir Mountain! Fir Mountain!" called the brakeman, loudly, at the end of the car.

At the same moment Stella glanced out of the window and cried: "There 's Bossy! See, right by the corner of the station!"

Sure enough, there was the cow tied to a post and browsing on the rich grass with every appearance of content. She did not seem to mind the cars at all.

The conductor helped the Aldens alight with their packages, and the men soon had all their furniture out upon the platform. The bell rang, the engine panted, and away rolled the train under a bridge, round a curve, and out of sight.

CHAPTER III.

A DISCOVERY.

As soon as the train was off, Mr. Alden, taking King with him, began to look about to find his shop. There was a little building near the depot, with a large sign in front in gilt letters: —

RUSTIC BAZAAR.

Mr. Alden took a key from his pocket and tried the lock. It fitted perfectly, and opening the door, they entered.

They found a single room with a counter on each side running from front to back. There was a place for a stove in the middle.

"Ah," said King, "we can have a fire on cold, rainy days, can't we, father?"

"To be sure we can. And all the wood we want, for nothing."

"I mean to keep a nice wood-pile in that place," said King, pointing to a vacant corner. "That shall be one of my duties every day."

Mr. Alden was inclined to be just a little homesick at first, but the boy's cheerful tone encouraged him.

"There's nothing here to sell yet," he said, glancing over the empty counters and shelves. "But then," he added, "there are not many people here to buy, so that does n't make much difference."

"Where are we to live, father?"

"I can't tell yet, my boy. We must find some one and ask."

The station-master, a burly, good-natured man with a round, jolly face, just then appeared at the door.

"I suppose you 're Mr. Alden, the new store-keeper?" he said, holding out his hand and giving Robert a hearty grip. "And this must be your boy — the one that saved a smash-up on our road not long ago. I 'm Mr. Stevenson, in charge here."

The three were good friends at once. The family were to stop at the hotel for awhile, said Mr. Stevenson, and could have their rooms rent free till the first of

May. Men were already taking their furniture up from the platform where it had been left. The cow would be cared for in the hotel stables.

"Now, Robert," said his smart little wife, as soon as they were alone, "it will never do to board at that hotel this summer. It will cost too much. We must find some other way."

They walked down to the shop together, and examined it carefully, but it was plain that they could not sleep in it.

Mr. Alden was almost discouraged again; but King, who had followed them, spoke up bravely. "We shall find a way somehow, mother," he said. "I don't believe

God would help us so far and leave right off."

"Perhaps there is some kind of a house among the loggers," added Polly. "At any rate, we can inquire."

Nothing more could be done that day, however; nor could they find any place to live, though they spent a good part of the following forenoon in inquiring. The "loggers" were a set of rough men, employed in a large saw-mill, about half a mile from the hotel. They lived with their families in a clump of low, ill-kept hovels beside the railroad; the women and children were so ill-bred and dirty that clean little Mrs. Polly could not think of boarding with them.

There were perhaps a hundred, old and young, in the settlement, which was known along the road as "Slabtown." There was no school, church, or Sunday-school in the place.

In the afternoon of the second day, Mrs. Alden, finding she could do nothing more about a home, very sensibly took Stella and Winthrop for a walk in the woods; leaving King behind with his father, to clear up the shop.

They struck into a path which led directly up the side of a lofty mountain overlooking the valley. There were tall firs and spruces all about them, and the forest floor was carpeted with green moss. Beside the path a

shy little stream came dancing down the hill-side, now hiding behind rocks and ferns, now peeping out at them again, and laughing in the sunshine. There were some pretty gray-and-white birds fluttering about among the dark boughs of the fir-trees, which Stella knew, from the pictures she had seen, must be snow-birds. It was too early for most of the summer birds yet; only a few had arrived from the South. Stella was like her father, easily discouraged and easily cheered up. The sight of God's wee brook coming down from the high country made her glad. Where were the clouds the brook must have seen and felt in the dark night? It had taken

them into its heart and turned them into diamonds flashing in the sunlight!

"That's the way I must do with my troubles and father's," thought the girl. "I'll be a contented little brook, trying to refresh whatever is near me, singing all the time, and keeping a bright face."

"Mother," she said presently, "let's go on as far as that little level spot beyond the big rock, and then rest."

They were about a quarter of a mile from the shop. Mrs. Alden sat down on the rock and Stella took care of her brother, who ran about eagerly among the trees, shouting and laughing at the top of his voice.

Soon they heard him calling a short distance away.

"What is it, you lively little squirrel?" cried Stella, merrily.

"I 've found a house!"

"A house! What does the boy mean?"

"A truly house, Stella, right in the woods. And grass too. Oh, come, do, and see!"

A few steps showed that he was right. There, just out of sight from the path, stood a good-sized log-cabin. It was surrounded by thick blue firs, except on one side, where there was a small clearing, in which grew a kind of long, luxuriant grass.

There was no door, and the three went in, wondering more

"I 've found a house!" — Page 30.

and more at every step. The cabin was divided into two rooms and had a large garret overhead, where lay heaps of yellow straw At one end of the further room below was a broad stone fire-place, with a clumsy iron crane for hanging kettles.

A queer sound caused Stella to look up quickly. There were tears in Mrs. Alden's brown eyes.

"What is it, mother?" exclaimed Stella, tenderly, coming to her side.

"Nothing to cry about, dear. It was just from joy to find our prayers answered so quickly."

"Answered?"

"Yes, dear. Here is our home — our new nest."

CHAPTER IV.

THE MOUNTAIN HOME.

What busy days followed! Mr. Alden had so much to do in repairing the shop and arranging the stock, which began to arrive in great cases, that he could not pay much attention to the new house. He was obliged to leave the moving almost entirely to King and his mother, while Stella helped, where she could, at both places. There was a sort of rough logging-road which led to the hut, and along this they managed to send up one load of furniture with a horse and drag which the hotel people lent them.

King was handy with tools, and using pieces of board which he found scattered about the saw-mill, where they had been thrown away, he made a very good door and mended the floor where repairs were needed.

The carpets from the old house were put down, and the garret divided into three bed-rooms.

There was a rude log stable only a few steps from the house; for this was, they found, an old logging-camp, built three or four years before and abandoned by the loggers. In the stable Whiteface was greatly pleased with a bed of clean, rustling straw. During the day she was allowed to feed in the little grass-plot, and

sometimes to take a meal down in the meadow, for a change.

A good fire was kept blazing in the fire-place, so as to dry the house thoroughly; and at the end of the week the family all moved in.

As evening came on, Winnie was frightened when he looked out of the narrow window and saw how black it was. Even Stella felt nervous, but she knew she ought to make the little boy brave, instead of being frightened with him. Besides, she had a lovely name that told her what she must do. Do you know what "Stella" means? Ask your big brother who studies Latin, and he will tell you that it is only another word

for *star.* Now our little Stella knew very well what stars are for —just to shine, night and day. In the day-time you don't notice the stars, because it is so bright, but at night, then they all commence to twinkle one after the other until if you look closely, you 'll find very little light in between them.

Stella resolved she would shine. So she took Winnie on her lap and began to tell him stories. She told him about the fir-trees, and how they were all tucked in with snow in the winter.

"But snow is cold," said Winnie.

"Not so cold as the air," laughed Stella. "Your blankets are cold sometimes, when you go

to bed in the winter. But they keep out the cold air, and so you grow warm. Then the trees have lots of company in the winter."

"What do you mean, Stella?"

"Oh, snow-birds, and wrens, and foxes, and mice. Yes, and partridges making embroidery."

Winnie laughed outright, forgetting his fear entirely.

"Well, sort of stamped patterns. They walk about in the snow and make the prettiest patterns you ever saw. Then you will see the tracks of old Master Fox, with just a little soft pat between the foot-prints."

"What makes that?"

"His bushy tail! I expect there are foxes close by us now, in the

woods, perhaps curled up tight, with their red noses snugly cuddled into their tails. Oh! and birds saying good-night to each other, and stars twinkling overhead in the sky and crowding up together to see their faces in that bit of a brook."

Winnie began to think the night a lovely thing, after all.

"What makes it night, Stella?" he asked sleepily.

"Just the old tired earth, dear, turning over and going to sleep."

"Does God go to sleep?"

Mr. Alden, who had been listening quietly, took down the Bible once more and read the One Hundred and Twenty-first Psalm. Then, after asking their heavenly

Father to watch over his sparrows in their new nest, they mounted the stairs to the little garret bed-rooms and were soon sound asleep.

THE SPARROW'S GREETING.

CHAPTER V.

BRIGHT DAYS.

STELLA rose early, like a faithful little star, on the morning after the first night in the mountain home. As she drew the bolt and slipped quietly out into the sunshine, she heard a sound which filled her heart with gladness. It was a burst of music from a small brown bird perched on a stump near the path. How he did sing! Stella was still half-asleep, and perhaps it was because she had been dreaming of sparrows that the wee bird's song seemed to be real words, something like this:—

"Night is over,
Day has come,
In the clover
Brown bees hum.
See, see,
How they come!
Now the yellow
Butterfly,
Pretty fellow,
Flutters by.
See, see,
What a fly!
Sunshine falling
On the tree —
Some one's calling!
Who can she —
Me? Me?
Yes, she's calling me!"

At any rate, just at this point another sparrow gave a queer little chirp in a thicket close by, and away flew the singer, as fast as he could fly. Stella laughed to herself, rubbed her eyes, and went in to help about breakfast.

One of the first tasks which King set himself to do was to prepare a garden. It was very small, to be sure, but it prospered amazingly. They had brought garden tools from the old home, and King took great pains to clear the ground from roots and dig it up thoroughly. The earth was rich, and the few flower-seeds they planted thrived and grew. Soon there were nasturtium vines and scarlet runners about the rough walls. Gilly-flowers were the first to blossom, and balsams and marigolds gave promise of glory in the late summer. In the midst of his other duties, Mr. Alden found time to plant potatoes and corn, and a small bed of such vegetables as

beets and turnips. The cow could no longer be allowed to go where she liked, and a fence of fallen trees was built around her little hill-pasture.

Down in the valley the Aldens were laughingly called "The Mountaineers," and soon they were known and liked, not only at the hotel, but throughout the little mill settlement. I wish I had time to tell how Polly and her daughter made friends among those ignorant women and children. It began in this way. One day they saw a girl, with an honest but sad face, coming down the mountain-path. She had been gathering wood and had a bundle of sticks in her arms.

Mrs. Alden called her in to rest, and while she was there talked with her about her home. The girl told her she had four younger brothers and sisters, and at Mrs. Alden's invitation promised to bring them the next day. It proved to be stormy, but through a pouring rain came the five, dripping, up the path. At first they were too bashful to say a word, but after they had all had bread and milk, they began to chatter.

Mrs. Alden told them one or two stories, gave them each a ginger-cake, and having got them as dry as she could, sent them home in the shelter of a broken umbrella and two water-proofs. The next day they were promptly

on hand, bringing back the borrowed articles, and ready to hear. They knew nothing whatever of God or Christ; had never heard the name. Quietly Mrs. Alden told them the story of Palestine, to which they listened with open eyes and ears. The next time she sung a little hymn, with the help of her own children; and the strangers, who, meanwhile, had brought one new scholar, joined in once or twice, half-frightened at the sound of their own voices. So began a school and a Sunday-school. Christ was talking to these little ones just as he talked when he had gone up into a mountain so many years ago.

King worked sturdily all summer to help his father, and the

little shop did so well that when autumn came all debts were paid off, and Mr. Alden was free to go back to his old place in Selborne, if he chose. He thought it all over, and at last decided to stay in his mountain home through the winter. It needed one more season, he said, to set him firmly on his feet. Some time I hope to tell you how they spent the cold months that followed in the log hut.

King, Stella, and Winnie, as well as their father and mother, continued to try their best to grow stronger and nobler and more helpful; more like Jesus of Nazareth; and so, always climbing upward, proved themselves true MOUNTAINEERS.

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